

<p>HANDS ACROSS LONG ISLAND, INC (HALI)</p> <p>CONSUMERS WITH CONVICTIONS PROGRAM</p>

Founded by Kathy Rogers, CSW, CRC in 1988, Hands Across Long Island, Inc (HALI) has grown from a small self-help group for consumers/survivors of mental illness to the largest consumer-run, multi-service agency in New York State. HALI facilitates over 30 self-help groups throughout Suffolk County and beyond and provides programs in advocacy, housing, transportation, art and music, and more. HALI works to encourage hope, pride, and self-awareness among its program participants, and to serve as a vehicle towards permanent housing, friendship, families, and fulfilling careers.

Part of HALI's focus is on easing the transition of individuals with mental illness as they return to the community from the corrections system. The *Consumers with Convictions* program began in 2002 to establish self-help groups in correctional institutions that could serve as a bridge to recovery-oriented communities upon release. The program is currently operating in both the Riverhead Correctional Facility in Suffolk Co., NY and in Sing Sing Prison.

In Sing Sing, the program offers Double Trouble support groups for individuals with co-occurring disorders, discharge planning assistance to secure access to housing and medications upon release, as well as interview training and linkage to employment assistance. The program serves up to 30 individuals at a time.

Upon release, HALI staff members transport individuals to their initial parole meeting and then to their permanent or temporary housing. All participants receive a 100-pg packet with contact information for NYC-area mental health and substance abuse treatment providers, food pantries, self-help groups and other social services. Literacy programs are offered through a partnership with Volunteers of America, and linkages to vocational programs in all 5 NYC boroughs are available through referrals to the NY Department of Labor. HALI staff is also available to serve as advocates and provide instruction on self-advocacy techniques. Through these efforts, HALI has been able to reduce recidivism among *Consumers with Convictions* participants from 65% to 15%.

Consumers with Convictions is also in operation in Suffolk County's Riverhead Correctional Facility, where HALI staff visit twice a week to provide anger management classes, women's and men's self-help groups and mental health assessments, as well as transportation and links to transitional housing upon release. All services are peer-run, as over 75% of HALI's staff members are themselves consumers of mental health services.

This summer, HALI plans to open a drop-in center across the street from the 31st St. Parole Office in NYC, where the released *Consumers with Convictions*

participants must report to the parole office each Wednesday. The drop in center will provide a place for consumers to connect and socialize with their peers, along with laptop and cell phone access, coffee and donuts, and social service contacts and referrals.

For more information about HALI, Inc's *Consumers with Convictions* programs, contact George Stone at gstone@hali88.org. For more information on HALI's history and other available services, visit them online at www.hali88.org.